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GUATEMALA

FIRST PERSON Center Becomes Outlet for Youth

Young man taps his love of music as opportunity to mentor local youth



Manfer Manuel Guzmán gives a student free music lessons while volunteering at the USAID-supported Ciudad del Sol Youth Outreach Center.

“I am very happy to be here, to help young people stay out of trouble that is everywhere around us and so easy to fall into,” said youth center volunteer Manfer Manuel Guzmán.

Telling Our Story
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When neighbors asked Manfer Manuel Guzmán how much the new Youth Outreach Center pays him, he said, “I’m paid with love and I’m planting seeds to harvest.”

Manfer volunteers three hours a week at the Ciudad del Sol Center, at his Evangelical church. Though he thinks it is not much time, he knows it goes a very long way. Manfer, who lives with his parents and brother, is a music teacher and a student at the Instituto Canción (Song Institute).

He says he never gave much thought to being a volunteer, even though as a child he thought that music lessons should be free and that it was unfair that his parents had to pay for his lessons. One day, Manfer was intrigued to hear that a USAID youth alliance program and his church were opening a center for youth that would encourage them to stay out of the clutches of gang recruiters and other forms of violence that his neighborhood confronts. He now teaches music, music theory, and electric piano to the youth that come to the center. And, in keeping with his principles, music lessons are free.

Manfer considers the best part of his volunteer service to be learning about the serious problems that his students face growing up in dangerous neighborhoods and how a few hours a week can help them grow in healthy and productive ways.

For 10 hours a day, Monday through Saturday, the eight USAID-supported youth outreach centers together serve over 1,500 youths between ages 7 and 25. The older youth use the centers as a refuge, and learn new skills for employment. Each center relies on the different skills and abilities that volunteers can offer. Volunteers provide expertise, knowledge, and experience in varied areas, from helping youth learn how to play a musical instrument to making cakes to sell.

Photo: Creative Associates/Marvin Méndez